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Next Leap Ahead

By Ross Dowson

It is no accident when asked by the students at Malvern Collegiate (Toronto) to put down their thoughts on Canada's future for posterity that ex- Prime Minister Pearson commented "it is quite impossible to forecast with any accuracy the shape of things to come." And that the would-be Tory leaders George Hees predicted only "a united and more prosperous Canada" and Michael Starr that Canada could become the United States of tomorrow. Characteristically NDP leader T.C. Douglas merely expressed belief in Canada, "faith in its future" and dedication "to its destiny" — without in any way defining what he thought this destiny to be.

The capitalist rulers of this country, and their hucksters in the academic, advertising and political arenas, by covering over the truth about the present, hope to hide the fact that Canada, as part of the advanced capitalist sector of the world, is now entering into the period of the greatest revolutionary change in its history.

The primitive communal society of the Indians that prevailed when the white man came to this continent was destroyed in blood and iron — what survived was shoved off onto the outer edges of the community. The feudal regime, artificially imposed in the settled areas of New France, was in turn brushed aside. The agents of the capitalist forces, that triumphed in Britain and later France through great revolutionary deeds, imposed private property in the means of production and the conditions of wage labor on the newly developing continent.

Thus Canada, in its own particular way, went through all the processes of social evolution that western civilization underwent.

The Russian Revolution (its 50th anniversary is being celebrated at the same time as 100 years of Confederation)

sounded the death knell of the world capitalist order at the same time as it proclaimed the new world socialist order. Since then the world has been moving unevenly, erratically, but nonetheless forward to socialism. Major sectors of the world's peoples have taken the socialist way. Elsewhere, millions think of themselves and support political parties and movements that declare themselves socialist. North America is indeed the last bulwark of capitalism.

So powerful are the forces driving to this solution, so inexorable are they in their course that in some areas of the globe, the popular struggles took the socialist road, although their leaderships did not project such a solution. This happened in Yugoslavia, in China and again in Cuba. Fidel Castro and his heroic band launched their struggle from the Sierra Maestra as liberal democrats, but as they met its challenges, evolved into revolutionary socialists.

Those who think Canada will not go socialist are required to explain why this country should be an exception. Canada has developed fully in accord — so far — with the ideas of Marx.

The class struggle

Who, in the face of wave after wave of strikes, rising on several occasions almost to the pitch of general strikes — can deny the existence of the class struggle? Indeed the struggle between labor and capital for a re-division of the surplus product has advanced onto the political plane in Canada to the extent that labor has formed a party of its own, the New Democratic Party, projecting as its aim the taking of political power.

Not only has Canada a developed capitalist economy, but it is one of the most highly monopolized in the world, with extensive imperialist holdings — particularly in Latin America — through which the most ruthless exploitation is conducted. The laws governing capitalism on an international scale allowed no exception to Canada in 1929 when the crash and depression

threw thousands out of work and wiped out all their accumulated possessions.

Ever since then, despite the boom initiated by the rehabilitation of war-torn Europe, by the war in Korea, and now Vietnam, despite manipulation of money, credit, and interest, not even the most capitalist-minded would deny that we may almost momentarily be thrust into an economic crisis. They fear that such a crisis will shake society to its very roots and pose as the supreme necessity the placing of the great industrial plants across the country under public ownership, under workers' control — to form the substructure of the new social order — socialism.

What is socialism? During the flood tide of the struggles that swept Poland, culminating in the great 1956 Hungarian uprising to establish popular control over the planned economy — a Polish intellectual answered this question. He laid down, one after another, statement upon statement of what socialism is not. Socialism is not the rule of bureaucrats over the people. It is not the shaping of the desires and aspirations of the individual to conform to some preconceived notion of what is in the interests of the whole, etc., etc.

Leon Trotsky, who, as co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution and continuator of Marxism into our epoch, initiated the struggle against Stalinism, once described socialism this way: it is "a pure and limpid social system which is accommodated to the self government of the toilers— an uninterrupted growth of universal equality — all-sided flowering of the human personality... unselfish, honest and human relations between human beings."

It is no accident that the great socialist thinkers failed to sketch out in any detail the new socialist society. As distinct from the many seekers of utopia down through the ages, they characterized themselves as scientific socialists. Instead of blueprinting the new society, they put under the microscope, they analyzed in the scientific spirit, the society in which we now live — capitalist society — the society out of which the new is

destined to come — seeking out its contradictions, discovering the laws governing its motion.

Revolutionary realism

They had no need to idealize man. They saw the totality of man's condition as determining man's consciousness. They saw the class struggle as the lever of social change, and the modern working class, created by capitalism, as the revolutionary force destined to establish the new social conditions necessary for the full development of mankind.

They foresaw the workers, out of painful experience, overcoming their divisions and their hesitations, and out of necessity, seizing the power from the hands of the capitalist class who now possess it, abolishing the whole state structure that they have developed to serve their interests and forming organs of workers' power. With the release of the capitalist fetters on the productive forces — the least of which are planned obsolescence, and costly and deceptive packaging — and the availability of plenty for all, they foresaw the disappearance of class antagonisms.

Far from promoting class antagonisms and conflicts, Marx saw them as an integral part of, as being built right into the capitalist system. "If," as he put it in the famed Manifesto, which he wrote with the youthful Engels, the working class "is compelled to organize as a class; if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and as such sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class."

Towards freedom

Far from being proponents of some all-engulfing statism, Marx and Engels saw the state, as class antagonisms dissipated, beginning to wither away — being transformed as an instrument to preserve democracy into an administrative tool.

While in present day Canada the *raison d'être*, the underlying purpose, of production is the amassing of profits for capital; in the new, free society its sole purpose will be to meet the needs of humankind. In the place of the present anarchy, waste and inefficiency, production will be planned. This planning, contrary to the type now commonly envisaged by would-be-advisors of capital, requires the common ownership of the key and strategic sectors of the economy — in Canada, the banking institutions, the railways, basic steel, the auto and farm implement plants, the forest industries, mining, smelting, etc.

Marx and Engels never thought that a socialist society could be built on the foundations of a backward underdeveloped economy, although history proved, as Trotsky projected, that the workers, in alliance with the peasantry, could take the power in Russia. They saw socialism as the next stage of social evolution, a higher stage than capitalism, at which level mankind has already conquered nature and has already developed means of production capable of supplying every human need.

If, as Marxism explains — the bureaucracy arose in Russia because of the backwardness of the economy, the low cultural level of the population, its further impoverishment due to the Allied armies of intervention and the extended blockade — what has the future in store for Canada?

Will conquer all

Whereas Confederation was foisted on our forefathers, the coming Canadian revolution will be the most profoundly democratic act in our entire history. Those forces that have built and sustained a mighty union movement, created and sustained a mass political party of their own, who will overcome all the chicanery and deception of the ruling class and their high-priced help, to storm and conquer the very citadels of their power, are not likely to succumb to the blandishments of some two-bit operators who might inveigle their way into its ranks for their own purposes. The profoundly democratic instruments necessary to mobilize the vast majority of the population to such a titanic task will separate out the opportunists and frauds.

There is no doubt that the working people will prove able to build the democratic institutions necessary to their struggle. In 1919 the people of Winnipeg, in order to carry forward their general strike, forged a body which sensitively represented every layer of the population — except the employers. While the General Strike Committee co-existed with the City Council, it completely supplanted it. Its representatives, elected largely along occupational lines, subject to immediate recall, serving without pay and in almost constant session, ran the city for 41 days. This committee had the main general characteristics of the workers councils that arose spontaneously in Russia in 1905 and again in 1917 when they led the seizure of power — and those councils that again arose out of the masses during the great Hungarian uprising of 1956.

Not only will the revolution itself be profoundly democratic, but with its victory will come almost instantaneous benefits for all. Thanks to the tremendous productive capacity we have created across this land, we will be quickly able to satisfy all the basic needs of everyone. There will be no real shortages that would require some kind of policeman to supervise who gets what, and no bureaucrats with the possibility of providing special favors that would allow them to gather up connections that would frustrate the democratic process.

One of the first acts of the popular councils would be to place the factories — all the key and essential industries — into the hands of those who operate them. Canada-wide planning boards would be set up. The aid of highly skilled technicians would immediately be enlisted. For the first time they would know that their specialized knowledge would be applied entirely for the benefit of mankind. Should any of them remain sceptical, there is no reason why the new owners could not pay them as well as the old.

They could begin by taking down those dreary reports that the Dominion Bureau of Statistics has been piling up year after year detailing how many Canadians do not have running water, inside plumbing, central heating, vacuum cleaners and washing machines, and immediately eradicate this scandalous situation.

That could be the first dividend declared to the benefit of the new shareholders of Canada's plant.

It is obvious that no power on earth would have the possibility or a purpose in attacking us. The American workers, if they have not preceded us, will be going socialist at about the same time as ourselves, or they would be so far advanced that their rulers would be paralyzed from moving against us in fear that this would be the spark which would settle the whole matter. We could therefore immediately cut out the tremendous wealth that has been wasted in the production of military hardware.

We would immediately declare all military commitments made in our name, both the open ones and the secret ones, null and void. We would relinquish any and all claims that Canadian capitalism has in other lands, its foreign investments, special trade advantages, or whatever they may be.

The new Canada would not draw in on itself, move in the direction of attempting to establish a completely diversified and self-sustaining economy. Gradually, so that there would be no undue stress on any particular community, we would move towards free trade with all peoples.

We would see our wealth as part of mankind's common heritage. And we would immediately act to bring the future development of that section of the world which we inhabit into harmony with a world plan — a world economy. If at first we traded or exchanged value for value, in no time our United States of North America, with its unparalleled natural resources and productivity, would be producing with no other thought than for the well-being of mankind.

While many prejudices are deeply rooted in the past they have been sedulously fostered and even whipped up by the ruling class and their agents to divide the workers and pit them against one another and away from their common enemy. The new organs of power would drive out, terminate every element of racial discrimination, particularly as it appears in government regulations such as the immigration legislation and where, if not

spelled out, it is intuitively enforced by administrators. They would enact legislation and generate a total atmosphere that would hold up to public condemnation everyone who in any way practiced racial discrimination. It would set an example by opening the door wide to Indians, Eskimos, Negroes, and immigrants from every land, so that they could assume the highest and most respected public posts.

Québec Libre

What about Quebec? Any and all ideas that Confederation is some kind of sacred bond to which the Québécois are committed will be repudiated once and for all. The Québécois will be assured of their right to self-determination, right up to and including secession. If they have not already solved this matter in the course of the combined struggle of the French and English Canadian workers against les trustards, both anglais and American, one of the first acts that would probably be considered, in close consultation with the leaders of the working people there, would be to hold a plebiscite. Here, the complete freedom of the press and the air, to every opinion, no matter how small, that would have already been established, would permit the Québécois, for the first time, to actually ascertain what they want, and freely act accordingly.

At the same time as the death knell to the age of conformity is sounded, ostentatious displays of eccentricity and individualism will end. Reason and human solidarity will prevail. The cult of youth, so sedulously fostered by capitalism, the pitting of youth against age, that alienates one from the other, will be ended. There will be no desire to escape or seek new sensations in drugs when the entire world, with all its mysteries and challenges, will be opened up for investigation and conquest.

Mankind is moving towards a showdown with all the forces of the old order.

In the capitalist west as elsewhere new challenges are confronting the masses. The patches and piecemeal remedies of

the reformers do no good. The affluent society is a myth. As Prime Minister Pearson's advisor Tom Kent expressed it before a federal-provincial conference, the poor — although they may not be as materially impoverished as in the past — may well be actually worse off in relation to the affluence around them. According to the government's own criteria millions of Canadians live in poverty.

Not the least of the new challenges is the technological revolution called automation, which is undermining the entire structure and old established relations.

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Ross Dowson is executive secretary of the League for Socialist Action/La Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière. Through the LSA/LSO the YS/LJS is linked to the Canadian working class movement and the Fourth International, world party of the socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky.